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AUTHOR Thompson, Lois J.; Jacques, Ronald W.
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ABSTRACT

This description of the Partners in Encouragement (PIE) program and the methods used to implement the program provide a model for school counselors to combat teacher burnout and improve morale. A discussion of the preliminary planning needs focuses on ways to inform prospective participants of the program, and outlines the introduction to be presented at the first group session. Topics covered in the weekly sessions, as well as the theory and rationale, are presented. Activities include building helping skills, becoming more non-judgmental, learning to evaluate personal skills, and sharing experiences through the encouragement process. Partnership meetings are also described, in which two teachers meet for a one-hour encouragement session once a week, with each person acting as both an "encourager" and an "encouragee." Program results, teacher responses, and the application of PIE to other settings are also provided. (NRB)

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PARTNERS IN ENCOURAGEMENT:
A PEER COUNSELING MODEL FOR TEACHERS

by

Lois J. Thompson, M.A.
Doctoral Assistant
Department of Counselor Education and Special Education
Idaho State University
Pocatello, Idaho

and

Ronald W. Jacques, Ed.D.
Assistant Professor
Department of Psychology/Sociology
Northwest Missouri State University
Maryville, Missouri

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Lois J. Thompson received her B.A. from Cornell College, Mount Vernon, Iowa, in 1955, and her M.A. from Idaho State University, Pocatello, Idaho, in 1964. She is currently a doctoral assistant in the Counselor Education program at Idaho State and will receive the Ed.D in May, 1981.

Ronald W. Jacques received his B.S. from Utah State University in 1971. His M.Ed. from Brigham Young University in 1975 was in Counseling and Guidance. He received his Ed.D. from Idaho State University in 1980. He is currently an Assistant Professor in the Department of Psychology/Sociology at Northwest Missouri State University in Maryville, Missouri.

PARTNERS IN ENCOURAGEMENT:

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It has been a typically hectic day of teaching, planning, meetings, and extra-curricular activities. However, two of the teachers are relaxed and happy. They have just completed their weekly encouragement session.

Each week, the two teachers, Alice and Marie, get together for about an hour. Each partner spends half of the time as encourager and the other half receiving encouragement. The school counselor has helped them prepare for the encouragement sessions through in-service training.

Since the teachers in the school started these sessions several months ago, comments can often be heard such as: "It was really helpful to discuss positive things." "It was important to share with another teacher." "It gave me a chance to unwind and release tensions each week." "These meetings have helped my teaching to become more effective, easier, and more practical." "I wish other schools in the district were doing this too."

Partners in Encouragement (PIE) is a program that has been developed to have a positive impact on teacher morale. The purpose of this article is to describe the PIE program and the methods that were used to implement the program. This article provides school counselors and others with a model that can be used in their various settings.

BACKGROUND AND REVIEW OF LITERATURE

For years it has been stated repeatedly that many teachers become discouraged and that this has a detrimental effect on public school education. However, a way has not yet been discovered to successfully solve this problem. In Glasser's Schools Without Failure, we read: "Teachers who teach right answers are frustrated because the children refuse to learn what they teach as soon as it gets above the most simple level," and "Teachers have seldom felt more alienated from the kids." (Glasser, 1969, pp. 40, 57). Dinkmeyer and Carlson further report that: "Teachers often feel unprepared for the challenge of educating youth in this era," and "The schools are currently in the midst of a crisis with a growing wave of discontent on the part of students, parents, and teachers." (Dinkmeyer and Carlson, 1973, pp. 2, v).

The growing tragedy of teacher burnout and discouragement is becoming more and more apparent. A recent issue of the American Teacher describes this alarming situation (Newell, 1978-79).

The March 1979 issue of Principal states that "many principals have long recognized the symptoms of burnout in veteran teachers . . . . Today, however, principals claim that it's happening more frequently. Because the disintegration of even one member of the faculty affects the entire school, burnout is becoming one of their top problems. In varying degrees, principals must now deal with burnout symptoms daily . . . ." (Reed, 1979, pp. 67-70).

Barbara Hendrickson also describes the situation in the January, 1979, issue of Learning: "Although burnout is an occupational hazard that all teachers (and, in fact, all members of the helping professions)

are exposed to sooner or later, its effect varies with the individual. Some teachers leave teaching altogether. Others burn out but stay on the job - counting the days until Friday, turning themselves off as they enter the schoolyard, waiting for retirement. But there are also teachers who have learned coping skills that enable them to face the stresses involved in their work and to grow with them." (Hendrickson, 1979, pp. 37-39).

One method of learning to redirect the trend toward encouragement is the "Partners in Encouragement" model. Through this program teachers can develop a more positive attitude about themselves and others. They are able to see their situation in a different perspective and feel the support and caring of others. With their regained courage they can face challenges and recognize difficult situations as opportunities for progress. This positive attitude seems to spread throughout the school system and beyond and encourages an approach toward life which can benefit many.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROGRAM

The Partners in Encouragement program was developed in connection with Continuing Education classes for teachers taught by the authors. Twenty-nine teachers participated in the combined program in two different school districts. Through weekly partnership sessions and also once-a-week group meetings, the participants learned how to provide support and encouragement for each other.

In order to set up a program of this type some preliminary planning is needed to inform prospective participants of the opportunity that is available. Those interested in the program may have many questions and

doubts as they attend the first group session. At this time these questions can be answered and the structure of the program and the theory and rationale of encouragement and building positive relationships can be explained.

The Partners in Encouragement program stresses the basic concepts of Individual Psychology by Alfred Adler including the striving force of all human activity towards superiority and perfection; that this striving is ultimately the creation of each individual; that we can work with people more effectively by understanding their goals and purposes; the significance of one's own self-opinion and concept of the world and the influence of one's style of life; and that the individual cannot be considered apart from the social situation (Ansbacher and Ansbacher, 1956).

The four mistaken goals of behavior - seeking attention, power, revenge, and the display of inadequacy (completely giving up or showing how helpless one is) are also discussed (Dinkmeyer, Pew, and Dinkmeyer, Jr., 1979). The concept of natural and logical consequences is also presented (Jacques, 1980). Through this concept it can be realized that in human relationships one can respond in accord with natural results or logical consequences rather than by trying to hurt or get even with another person. This helps an individual become more responsible for his/her own actions and not become involved in power struggles or revenge seeking.

The group sessions also consider the signs of a discouraged person such as dishonesty, excessive need for attention, need for perfection, avoidance of responsibility, and lack of confidence. The group also

examines signs of a self-encouraged person such as being responsible, taking risks, trying new experiences, and becoming independent as presented by Lewis Losoncy (Losoncy, 1977).

Other ideas which are used in the PIE group sessions include some of the points which were presented by Dr. Thomas Edgar at an Encouragement Conference at Idaho State University (Edgar, 1979). Encouragement is a way of approaching life and other people and helping them to believe in themselves so that when they make a mistake they don't think of themselves as failures. To be an encouraging person each of us has to make a commitment to some deep personal change and only then will we relate to other people in a more positive way. Encouragement is related to the Adlerian concepts of equality, social interest, and vertical and horizontal relationships. In a horizontal relationship people are considered equal and on the same level, whereas in the vertical relationship one person acts superior to or above the other. The qualities of respect and being non-judgmental are especially helpful in establishing horizontal relationships. People who participate in vertical relationships cannot afford to strengthen others because this would threaten their own position.

The participants in the group sessions discuss ways of encouraging people, considering what qualities in a person have an encouraging effect on others and ways to encourage or discourage people. The definition of encouragement is discussed and also how encouragement differs from praise. Encouragement is described in the PIE program as stressing effort and responsibility, having faith in a person to do his or her best, caring and being willing to listen, stressing positive aspects, and being willing to recognize mistakes as part of the learning

process and as providing an opportunity for even greater growth. Praise, on the other hand, is described as stressing perfection, competition, and emphasis on the product rather than on the efforts of the person. It is recognized that praise might actually have a discouraging effect on those who feel the standards are impossible to attain (Thompson, 1980).

The group meetings also include exercises that focus on awareness, responsibility, and interpersonal relationships. In order for the participants to develop the helping skills necessary for the program, instruction and activities are provided involving active listening, reflection of feeling and content, awareness of body language, effective feedback, sharing, genuineness, concreteness, immediacy, empathy, positive regard, trust, respect, and being non-judgmental. Many of the group activities which were selected specifically to meet current participant needs were taken from The Counselor and the Group (Trotzer, 1977). Also, each week in their group session, the participants evaluate the group meeting and their partnership session including their own contribution and attitude. They also have an opportunity to request more help in the specific skills.

The sequence of the sessions progresses naturally from the explanation of the theory and rationale and activities that share ideas of encouragement at the first session, to building helping skills from active listening and effective feedback to being non-judgmental at the next sessions, and more evaluation of skills and sharing of experiences in using the encouragement process at the later sessions.

THE PARTNERSHIP SESSIONS

At the first group session the teachers receive an explanation of the Partners in Encouragement model. Time is provided for the group to divide into pairs and make arrangements for their weekly partnership meetings. One hour each week is set aside for the encouragement session, with each person taking one-half hour as encourager and a half hour being encouraged. Times vary according to schedules. Flexibility is helpful as long as it does not result in neglecting the sessions. To avoid interruptions some partners would use a "Please do not disturb" sign or other methods to indicate that a session is taking place.

It is important that the partners do not only chat with each other. If what is discussed is important to the speaker, something that he or she really cares about, then the session can be meaningful and constructive. Some appropriate ideas for discussion might include:

(1) How one feels about teaching, oneself, or one's relationship with others.

(2) What has been going on in the classroom or other experiences.

(3) Strengths, weaknesses, or specific problems.

(4) Goals.

(5) Something positive or something one is looking forward to.

It is recommended that the partners stay within the designated time limits and spend the last five minutes or so of each half hour unwinding. During this concluding time, they could discuss what they're looking forward to or what they'd like to work on during the week. It

is helpful to end on an encouraging note with supporting comments and appreciation.

Some time during the weekly group sessions is devoted to working in dyads to practice and get feedback on the skills being developed. The partnership sessions assist in the goal of developing more of a willingness to look at ourselves and others and relationships, and to see things in a better perspective, which is conducive to having more meaningful and constructive experiences.

RESULTS OF THE PROGRAM

Some of the results of the PIE program were more positive attitudes, more effective teaching, better relationships, greater awareness and insight, and the setting and reaching of meaningful goals.

The responses of the teachers who participated were extremely enthusiastic. Following are some of their comments:

"Concerning the effects of PIE in my life, I'm delighted with the ideas and feel it has made me more enthusiastic about life, etc."

"It's really listening with the heart, really being a good listener."

"PIE on a schoolwide basis could open communication channels, help re-build people's courage, and help to create a more positive attitude and atmosphere."

"PIE plays several important roles including:

(1) Helping faculty members develop a closer working relationship;

(2) Providing a positive, constructive outlet for frustrations;

(3) Providing a partner to work with so that you can work on

positive alternatives in problem situations."

"It has to have a give and take atmosphere with a feeling of trust built up from the beginning. It helps to relieve feelings before leaving for home. I felt the PIE experience was very valuable to me and I plan to try the techniques with others."

"Some positive effects of PIE are to provide a release of tension for a worried teacher and to help us accentuate the positive. It is really a good strategy to help share and solve problems."

"PIE made me look for positives, realize teaching is exciting and can have an encouraging side, and gave me insight into another's point of view."

"PIE is a breath of sunshine for me."

APPLICATION TO OTHER SETTINGS

The Partners in Encouragement model has been used successfully with teachers in the public schools, and plans are now being made to incorporate it into the teacher education program for prospective teachers. This program could also be developed for use in industry, religious and community organizations, and the home. Wherever people would benefit from the support, understanding, and caring of another person, there is an opportunity for the successful use of the PIE model.

SUMMARY

Teacher burnout and discouragement are becoming increasingly recognized as major problems in our public schools. One method of

combating this situation is through a program called "Partners in Encouragement." PIE has been used successfully with public school teachers in communities near Idaho State University. This program involves once-a-week group meetings and once-a-week partnership sessions. In the partnership sessions people participate in a supporting, understanding, and meaningful meeting for about an hour each week. Each person spends about half the hour as encourager and the other half being encouraged.

The skills and attitudes that contribute to healthy and helpful relationships are discussed and practiced in the group sessions, and through their use in the weekly partnership sessions also, the participants discover positive and encouraging changes taking place in their lives, their work, and their relationships with others.

Counselors and others are invited to use this program to help teachers and other partners learn how to support and encourage each other. Applications are possible in a wide variety of settings. The results of the Partners in Encouragement model have been very positive and plans are being made to use the program in other types of situations. It is recommended that this method as well as other means of providing encouragement to teachers and others continue to be studied and implemented in order to contribute to a more positive and healthy setting for members of our society.

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